R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 814 RE 000 122

READING IN THE KINDERGARTEN.

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PUB DATE MAR 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$1.12 28P.

DESCRIPTORS- *BEGINNING READING, *READING INSTRUCTION, *KINDERGARTEN, *STATE STANDARDS, *READING READINESS, WORKBOOKS, READING ACHIEVEMENT, MATURATION, CHILD DEVELOPMENT, LEARNING READINESS, READING PROCESSES, READING RESEARCH, EARLY READING, TRENTON

ARGUMENTS AGAINST FORMALIZED READING INSTRUCTION IN THE KINDERGARTEN WERE PRESENTED. AFTER PRELIMINARY COMMENTS CONCERNING THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE CONFERENCE, THE NEW JERSEY STATE BOARD STANDARDS FOR KINDERGARTENS WERE DISCUSSED IN LIGHT OF THEIR CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHMENT AND THEIR ADMINISTRATION. THE CASE AGAINST MAKING READING INSTRUCTION A PART OF THE KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM WAS DEVELOPED THROUGH AN EXAMINATION OF THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH (PARTICULARLY DURKIN'S). THE LONG RANGE EFFECTIVENESS OF READINESS WORKBOOKS AND OTHER FORMALIZED READINESS INSTRUCTION, LEARNING THEORY, THE PURPOSES AND GOALS OF THE KINDERGARTEN, AND THE VIEWS OF LEADERS OF NATIONAL REPUTE IN THE FIELDS OF READING, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING, PEDIATRICS, NEUROLOGY, CHILD PSYCHIATRY, AND PSYCHOLOGY. IT WAS CONCLUDED THAT ALTHOUGH STUDENTS WHO COME TO KINDERGARTEN KNOWING HOW TO READ OR DESIRING TO READ SHOULD NOT BE PREVENTED FROM DOING SO, RESEARCH HAS NOT YET PROVIDED EVIDENCE THAT EARLY SYSTEMATIC READING INSTRUCTION GREATLY ACCELERATES READING ACHIEVEMENT. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, MARCH 23, 1966. (LS)

ED011814

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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March, 1966

READING IN THE KINDERGARTEN?

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RE 000 122

This paper was presented and distributed at a meeting at Rutgers University on March 23, 1966. It has been printed to fill the volume of requests for additional copies which come to the Department following the meeting.

READING IN THE KINDERGARTEN?

March 23, 1966

SOME PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

It may seem inappropriate for a guest speaker to comment on the purpose and procedure of a conference but it seems necessary to make an observation or two. These comments are partly in response to the many expressions of concern which have come to the Department about the meeting and partly so that you may understand the position from which I am speaking.

The purpose of the conference

The publicity about the conference gives the impression that reading in the kindergarten is an issue in New Jersey because of the standards for kindergarten approval set by the State Board of Education. This misconception should be corrected.

Reading in the kindergarten is an issue in New Jersey, and elsewhere, because some persons are promoting the introduction of a formal academic curriculum early in the young child's school life. This movement is resisted by others who believe it will impede learning and have other ill effects. Omitting, for the moment, such ever present realities as profit making, publicity seeking and public pressure, the issue is created by differences of opinion among professionals, not by the State Board standards which have been in force since 1949.

As to the purpose of this conference: I suggest that it is not the proper function of an unofficial gathering initiated by a reading center to seek decisions regarding the validity of State Board standards. The proper purpose of a conference such as this seems to be to seek light on the question of what place reading may or may not have in the young child's schooling.

The conference plan

It is disappointing to find how limited are the sources of data represented on the program for examining the issue. The question we are dealing with is not an isolated question about reading. It is a question which involves the central purpose and focus of the kindergarten. What we are really talking about is what kindergartens shall be for. With all due respect to our distinguished speakers, there are great gaps in this conference program. Missing here are persons working with young children in the schools, and teaching in the colleges and universities, whose background of training, experience, and research is in the fields of human development and early childhood - including the well-trained and expert kindergarten teacher. Missing here, too, are experts in other disciplines who, in increasing numbers, are warning against the hazards of pressuring children - the pediatrician, the neurologist, the child psychiatrist and others.

Finally, I feel duty-bound to make one further comment about the conference plan. I was amazed to hear, some time after accepting an invitation to speak, that we are voting today. The vote will be secret, the conference announcement says, and the superintendents' vote will be

separated from that of other conference participants. Why secret? Why separate? Especially, why vote? I must say that it seems ludicrous to seek a decision on a question of this nature by a straw vote - secret or open - as remarkable, for example, as a group of pediatricians voting on issues of infant feeding. Seriously, as a teacher, I feel deep concern about this. I would feel embarrassed to have parents think we use the straw vote as a means of settling professional questions involving the welfare of their children. I hope it is not too late to eliminate this unseemly item from the agenda.

THE STATE BOARD STANDARDS: WHY ESTABLISHED AND HOW ADMINISTERED

During my time with you, I want to develop a position on the reading issue, and in this context to discuss the State Board Standards.

Laws Are Defined by Standards

Let's begin with standards, why they are established and how they are administered. As the administrators here know, the State Board of Education is obliged to formulate standards, or ground rules, for use in implementing school laws. In essence, these State Board standards spell out the intent of the laws and so have the force of law.

Kindergarten Standards Are Pursuant to Attendance and Pupil Accounting Laws

Among the standards defining the compulsory attendance and pupil accounting laws are standards dealing with minimum length of school day. A school day must be at least four hours in length; an exception is the kindergarten which under certain conditions may be in session only $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours. This shortened day is permitted as desirable for small children who are learning to live at school. The kindergarten standards set the conditions under which the kindergarten may be state aided for a short day.

Kindergartens are in effect subsidized

A school district receives as much in State aid for kindergarten pupils on a $2\frac{1}{2}$ hour session as for other children on a 4 hour session. Thus, because a district may handle a maximum of 50 children in two $2\frac{1}{2}$ hour kindergarten sessions, using one teacher, one room, and one set of equipment, the district receives what amounts to double financial aid for kindergarten.

Standards are minimum

Because the kindergarten session is so short, only half as long as the typical school day, and because of the financial advantage accruing to the local district, standards are set to assure that the basic character and purpose of the kindergarten is respected. These standards set minimum requirements of decency in relation to housing and class size.

They call for appropriate equipment and materials, a program suited to the developmental needs of children, and rule out formal instruction. An interpretation of the phrase, "formal instruction" will be made later.

In passing, we have been told that, in isolated instances, the term "formal" has been interpreted in odd ways, as for example, meaning that nothing containing print shall be placed in the kindergarten room! This, of course, is the kind of interpretation which has never been made by the Department. On the contrary, our publications emphasize the important place of children's books in the kindergarten.

How Kindergarten Standards Are Administered

The distribution of State aid requires evidence from the local administrators that the aid is justified. For example, through the school registers, the local administrator certifies to facts of pupil enrollments and daily attendance. The same procedure is involved with the kindergarten standards. The local administrator certifies to the county superintendent of schools that the kindergartens in the district are operating according to regulations. Some of you may have read a newspaper article stating that the local administrator must "sign a paper" to attest that kindergarten teachers are not teaching reading. This statement reflects ignorance of the long time orderly procedure for distributing State funds. The Department is not asking the superintendents to sign a pledge - only to follow a procedure always involved in distributing State aid. The Department demonstrates its respect for the integrity of local administrators by a process of accounting which does not involve inspection.

Standards are Based upon Best Current Thinking and Practice

It should be emphasized that these standards are not the product of whim or personal opinion. They are in keeping with the best thinking and practice in the State and in the country.

New Jersey is favorably known over the country for the quality and universality of its kindergarten program. States and districts in other parts of the nation which are trying to get kindergartens started frequently look to New Jersey for advice. New Jersey materials describing our program are widely used. For example, the Association for Childhood Education, International distributes under its own imprint throughout the country and the world, two of our bulletins reflecting the standards. These are, "What Are Kindergartens For?" and "Shall We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" the latter guest-written by Dr. Nila Banton Smith, immediate past president of the International Reading Association and a respected leader in the reading field. In "Shall We Teach Formal Reading in the Kindergarten?" Dr. Smith describes and supports the many informal contacts with reading present in the good kindergarten and documents the inappropriateness of formal reading at this level. The ACEI has sold 200,000 copies of these bulletins and are in the process of reprinting both of them.

THE READING ISSUE

So much for the development and administration of standards. I want now to examine the issue of reading in the kindergarten and in the process indicate how the kindergarten standards relating to formal reading instruction may be interpreted.

The Few Children Who Can Read or Are Trying to Read

Let's begin with that small number of children - one in 100, one in 50, if we can believe the research, who come to school knowing how to read (not just recognizing some letters or words, but reading). Add the few children who genuinely seek to read.

The Durkin studies and "formal instruction"

Durkin's studies of children who learned to read at home are used frequently to support formal reading instruction. In my opinion, the Durkin studies do not support formal instruction. At I.R.A. in Chicago last month Dr. Durkin reported that the children in her studies who learned to read at home were, after 6 years, some months ahead of the control group of equally bright children who did not learn to read at home. But quoting a resume' of her Chicago presentation, "The researcher cautions about moving directly from positive findings about early reading that begins at home to conclusions about the time to begin school instruction in reading." In the November 1964 issue of the Elementary School Journal, reporting at the end of five years of study of her 49 subjects, she says the same kind of thing:

> "Do these combined findings, then, provide positive support for earlier school instruction in reading? Not necessarily. To move from positive findings about children who first learned to read at home to a recommendation for earlier school instruction is to take a big step over a wide gap."

It is too big a step over too wide a gap. For one reason, we would have to assume that because 49 children (out of the 5,138 children tested) learned to read at home, others of equal intelligence ought to be taught. This is an unfounded assumption. The crucial question which the Durkin study does not answer is, Why did not comparably bright children in the control group learn to read at home? Thirty-eight of the 49 early readers learned without deliberate teaching; but the equally bright children in the control group did not learn. Why not? Might it be, for example, that the few early readers are biologically older and thus are equipped earlier for the complex tasks involved in reading? Might not this be the reason why their gain persists to a degree? In any case, the study indicates that children of equivalent IQ are not equally interested or ready for reading.

The Journal article provides further data bearing on the matter of formal instruction. Again quoting:

> "They (the early readers) had someone in their environment who was willing to answer questions and stimulate more questions. For the most part, too, these early readers were given opportunity to learn to read words that were of great interest to them. While some of these words appeared in books, others were found on cars and trucks, on street signs and TV commercials, on labels on phonograph records and packaged and canned foods."

In essence then, the 49 children picked up their skills in a highly informal fashion using the printed words that surrounded them as they moved about home and community, in a one-to-one relationship with a family member. It is especially interesting that many of the words they learned were experience based - the labels on phonograph records, on packaged and canned foods, etc. - closely related to seeing, hearing, handling and using.

Continuing to quote Durkin:

"Contrast this approach to learning to read with a typical first grade reading program moved down to the kindergarten. The difference is great and the difference in outcome may be great too."

I do not want to misrepresent Dr. Durkin's position. She concludes that the prefirst grade child who is ready to profit from help should have it and she speaks for kindergartens which provide challenge. But she seems to be saying quite clearly that prefirst grade children should not be given formal instruction such as, for example, instruction from the basic materials brought down from first grade. She further indicates a position on formal instruction in her article in the October 1964 issue of the Reading Teacher and I quote:

"Kindergartens cluttered with workbooks and noisy with phonics certainly tempt me to urge, no reading in the kindergarten, please."

The Kindergarten Standards and the Early Reader

The kindergarten standards prohibit formal reading instruction - the first grade basic materials brought down to the kindergarten, a kindergarten "cluttered with workbooks and noisy with phonics.") But the standards in no way prohibit informal reading activities for the child who can read or is genuinely seeking to learn. Let me illustrate informal reading activities.

In a good kindergarten, all children have access in an attractive library center to a collection of fascinating, constantly changing, picture-story books. The teacher helps individuals and small groups enjoy these treasures. She will occasionally sit in the library center with a child who can read, listening to him read, asking questions, responding to his need for help. Without fanfare he may read to another child or a small group.

In addition to tradebooks, kindergarten children are surrounded by their own language products. The teacher takes down stories about their paintings, letters to parents and others, accounts of trips, records of experiments, stories about their personal experiences. A child who can read or who is trying to read has access to the best beginning reading materials - his own "talk written down." If it is really important for him to read, he will read these teacher-recorded materials with help as he seeks it.

Certainly, the children do not need readiness workbooks or pre-primers. Their needs are much better served by the more intellectually stimulating materials always available in the good kindergarten - their own language products recorded by the teacher and the books in the library center.

The Issue of Teaching Reading Systematically to all Children

Thus far, we have talked of the precocious children, a few to be found in some kindergarten groups, not present at all in others. We have described how within the intent of the kindergarten standards, the teacher can help them informally - at the same time involving them most of the time in the

many active ways of learning that all of them need and some need desperately - without infringing upon the time and attention needed by the total group. Competent kindergarten teachers handle this arrangement well. It isn't really a problem unless we make one of it.

Let's move on to the really crucial question of formal systematic reading instruction with the use of basal reading materials. Should it be an integral part of the kindergarten curriculum? Shall we, for example, use the X Readiness Test and identify those who might with systematic teaching, learn to read after a fashion? Shall we introduce readiness workbooks, teach the names and sounds of letters, move to the preprimers? Shall we expose all 5 year olds to systematic reading instruction (or perhaps 3 and 4 year olds or even, a la Doman, 18 month olds)?

The intent of the standards

The intent of the standards with regard to these questions is clear. Emphasize for all children activities that lay the foundation for successful reading, give informal help to the child who reads or tries to read but avoid formal, organized systematic teaching involving the use of basic textbook materials pointed toward specific skill mastery.

I shall develop the rationale underlying this position shortly, but one more comment on what is "formal."

Not even workbooks?

Readiness workbooks obviously fall into the category of formal instruction. This fact should cause no pain for there is no valid evidence to

indicate that workbooks have anything much to do with developing reading readiness in kindergarten children.

Nila Banton Smith commenting on the lack of such evidence, writes:

"Some schools caught in the pressure to hurry along the reading process are attempting to teach reading in kindergarten with the use of readiness workbooks which accompany basic readers. Discussions about growth factors which contribute to reading maturation offers some indication of the complexity of the process of acquiring ripeness to undertake systematic reading instruction. Does it seem reasonable that drawing lines and coloring pictures in a workbook will cause the kindergarten child to develop in the several basic growth areas which are responsible for the arrival of the 'teachable moment?"

Dolores Durkin's point of view on workbooks bears repeating, "Kindergartens cluttered with workbooks and noisy with phonics certainly tempt one to urge, no reading in the kindergarten, please."

Dr. Edward Fry, Director of the Rutgers University Reading Center, in a paper presented at the American Educational Research Association in February 1965 reports a study of first grade children in which four groups of 6 year olds who did not have formal readiness instruction, including readiness workbooks, got off to a faster start in reading than those who received formal readiness instruction. In other words, those 6 year olds who went through the readiness workbooks did less well. In his paper, Dr. Fry commented that a survey of the literature revealed no studies which strongly favored the use of reading readiness materials. After reporting his findings he said, "While this study may not sound the death knell for reading readiness workbooks, it is considerably less than a recommendation..... School superintendents who have to justify book expenditures to school boards

might expect to have an increasingly difficult time in asking for more money when there is so little proof that some of their money is not going for worthwhile materials." One might reasonably hypothesize that, if readiness workbooks are a waste of money and time for six year olds, they are at least equally indefensible for five year olds.

Common sense seems to reinforce these opinions and studies. Here is a selection from a 90 page kindergarten workbook which sells for $1.32 per copy plus additional charges for manuals and tests. Picture the teacher with the teacher's edition open in her hand. Picture the five year olds poised with the workbooks before them, a red and blue crayon in reach of each small hand. The teacher reads, and I quote:

> "Put a red X on the girl's left hand. Put a blue X on the girl's right hand. Draw a red line under the dog on the left. Draw a blue line under the dog on the right. Put a red line over the squirrel at the left. Put a blue line over the squirrel at the right. Put a blue line on the cat at the left. Put a red line on the cat at the right. Draw a red line from the cat at the left to the cat at the right. Put your crayons down."

Does anyone really think that there is "challenge" in this for a child who is considered too advanced for the activities of the kindergarten, the sophisticated, traveled, verbally able, nursery school bred child? Kindergarten teachers who foster the concept of left and right through the sweaters and snowpants, and the boots and rubbers, through setting the table in the home play center and for the mid-morning snack, through walking on the right side of the corridor on the way to the library, through greeting a guest by offering one's right hand - these teachers don't want

to spend the time and money on this blue-line-on-the-right-hand cat routine. I wonder how many of the children over the country who will go through this drill already have mastered the concept of left and right. Even more pertinent, I wonder how many children who do not know right hand from left will try to do the workbook page and only become more confused and anxious. They had better be able to identify and use their own right and left hands before they have to worry about dogs on the right or squirrels on the left.

Experienced kindergarten teachers point out that because of the limited attention span of small children, it is difficult and in some cases impossible to make children concentrate on workbooks long enough to complete an exercise. There is too little practice for children who have not already developed a concept or a competence, too much for children who have learned what the workbook is intended to teach.

NOT CAN WE, NOT MAY WE, BUT SHOULD WE?

So far, we have talked about whether some kindergarten children under some circumstances can learn, to some degree, to read. We have talked about the standards in terms of what we may do, but we really haven't gotten to the heart of the issue.

The heart of the issue is not can they be taught, but should they? I want to spend the remainder of my time with you on this question - not can they but should they? The burden of proof lies with those who would change the purpose and approach of the kindergarten. What proof is there that we should shift to formal reading instruction? What recognized authorities, what valid experience, what dependable research say we should?

Does past experience suggest we should?

The fact is that kindergartens were established in the first place partly to avoid failure for young children in beginning reading. Early in the century, in schools without kindergartens, failures among first graders who were expected to learn to read during their first year in school were as high in some instances as 40%. Do we want to move backward in that direction?

Does "the national welfare" suggest we should?

Are the Soviet's soft landing on the moon and the Venus affair going to resurrect the ghost of the first Sputnik which set off a chain reaction of pressures on American children? If the space race is a factor perhaps we should defer reading teaching later than we do instead of accelerating it. The Russians, you know, have their children out in the parks, on playgrounds, on exploring trips around the neighborhood, and talking about what they see and do. Russian children aren't exposed to systematic instruction until they are seven years old (and they've been to nursery school, too!)

Do persisting gains from early instruction suggest we should?

A few developmentally advanced children who pick up reading early will naturally continue to show superiority. The factors which enabled them to begin early without systematic teaching may contunue to operate. But if we examine studies such as those comparing Scottish children systematically taught at five years of age with English children who were

taught at six, we find evidence that early gains do not persist. In other words, early drill may produce temporary gains but the gains usually are not lasting.

The experience of many of us will bear out the fact that earlier is not necessarily faster. A nine year old who visited me recently received no systematic reading instruction until she entered first grade at 6 years 4 months. Now three years later, she can read from books intended for adults if they are about something she has experienced. More important, reading is an essential and satisfying part of her active young life. This is not an uncommon case.

A friend recently showed me the reading profile of 86 seventh graders in a New Jersey school who entered kindergarten in a suburban community and remained in the same district. Their kindergarten was experience rich, concept rich, language rich, but without formal instruction. The median reading achievement of this group at the beginning of seventh grade was a year above the national norm. Only 8 of the 86 children scored below grade level and none of the 8 more than a year below. Fifteen children scored more than two years above grade level and several more than three years above grade level. This kind of reading status is not at all uncommon in communities of this kind. The teachers do not feel that the children's achievement is extraordinary, on the other hand, they do not feel that their children were retarded by their pre-reading kindergarten year. On the contrary, the teachers value the kindergarten experience as foundational in their well-conceived reading program.

Do leaders of national repute in the reading field say so?

As one reads the publications of leaders of national repute in the reading field, one finds extraordinarily few advising formal or systematic reading instruction in kindergarten. They may not speak against it (although some do) but I do not find speaking for it (to mention a few) Guy Bond, Dorothy Brackin, Theodore Clymer, Albert Harris, David Russell, William Sheldon, Nila B. Smith.

Many reading specialists would consider that the expert kindergarten teacher, in essence, teaches reading because she so skillfully lays the groundwork. She surrounds the children with informal and satisfying contacts with reading. Through much first hand experience and many kinds of language activities she helps children grow in concepts and meanings, in vocabulary and language fluency, in power to observe and to hear. She seeks to identify and affect conditions which may lead to failure - thus her deep concern for children who are fearful, lonely, unloved, neglected, tired, listless, inarticulate, handicapped in speech, hearing or vision.

Incidentally, two leading proponents of teaching the very young are not reading specialists. Omar Khayam Moore, father of the "talking typewriter" is a sociologist. His electronic marvel evolved from earlier work for the Office of Naval Research. When it became difficult to carry on his experiments with adults, he decided, as reported in a printed interview in Harpers, May 1963, "To go in for ignorant subjects." The interviewer added, "The most ignorant subjects, of course, are the new born. The most practical time (for Dr. Moore) to start experimenting was when these children were up and about - at two-and-a-half or three."

Glenn Doman, author of, "How To Teach Your Baby to Read" (even before he is up and about) is a physical therapist involved in working with brain

damaged children. In his book he says, "We didn't actually begin to teach tiny children to read at the Institutes until 1961." His book, published in 1963 (only two years later) expresses no reservations about the desirability of teaching babies to read. Two years seems a remarkably short time to draw such sweeping conclusions on so unique a proposal either as to long time gains, or possible ill effects. Incidentally, Doman and his associate now have a kit for nursery school and kindergarten use. It costs $60.00 for each fifteen children. They have even indicated that we can get the money to pay for it from NDEA or ESEA. The new sources of money seem to be remarkable stimulators of new materials for the little ones.

Do leaders in early childhood education advise it?

What recognized leaders in early childhood education speak for systematic reading instruction in the kindergarten? I haven't found any. But I've heard persistent voices speaking against it - James Hymes, Neith Headley, Helen Heffernan, Lucille Lindberg, Minnie Bersen of the U.S. Office of Education, Dell B. Kjer, President of the Association for Childhood Education, International and a host of others.

Dr. Kenneth Wann, a leader in early childhood education and well known for his interest in the intellectual functioning of young children, doesn't encourage the early teaching of reading. On the contrary, he writes in the 1962 publication, "Fostering Intellectual Development":

> "It should be underlined again and again that the actual process of reading and writing is dependent upon a sound base of oral and aural skills in language. Too frequently the desire to move formal reading programs into the kindergarten and even into the nursery school overlooks the essential skills and deprives

children of the needed background for really effective reading. The period from three through five years of age is the period of great concern for words, words, and more words. We must respond to this concern and give children many experiences with words and their wonderful meanings. The purpose will be to expand vocabulary and give children meaning which they can bring to the printed page when they are ready to interpret the abstract symbols organized into sentences and paragraphs."

Are the students and practitioners in human development and learning, the pediatricians, the neurologists, the child psychiatrists, the psychologists telling us we should teach reading earlier?

Certainly they are not. They are telling us that we had better beware of the idea that a child can learn anything at any age and the sooner the better. This, they tell us, is just not so. They support what Olsen and others long since demonstrated - that reading is not an isolated mental exercise depending solely upon IQ and finding the "right" method. It is a complex integrative task involving the body as well as the mind. Readiness, including physical readiness, is a reality which must be taken into account. For example, Dr. Kenneth Zike, Head of the Department of Pediatrics at the Harbor General Hospital in Los Angeles points out that only about 25% of the children in kindergarten have reached a degree of neurological maturity to cope with the symbolization necessary for reading. The eye may be ready to receive the visual image but for more than 75% of the children, the neurological system has not reached the maturity needed to make connections between what they see and what they understand. There is nothing that can be done to speed up this readiness - only time can do that.

He reports that at least 50% of the children with learning problems referred to the neurological clinic at Harbor General Hospital have no traumas, no birth injuries or other physical deviations. Their trouble seems to come from pressure - pressure to do a task they do not have the maturity to do.

Closer to home is Dr. Catherine Spears, neuro-pediatrician, founder and medical director of the Child Evaluation Center at the Morristown, New Jersey, Memorial Hospital, also carrying a heavy private practice and widespread consultative service. In meetings of teachers and administrators in New Jersey, Dr. Spears has said on many occasions that we are on the wrong track if we move toward earlier introduction of an academic curriculum.

Too many panic stricken parents are trying to make their children adults almost before they are born, she says. She sees the results of this panic in her child patients - in peptic ulcers, psychosomatic complaints and learning inhibitions. She urges teachers not to become caught up in this panic and compound the pressures at school.

Dr. Spears reinforces the statement of Dr. Zike regarding the neurological unreadiness of most kindergarten children. She points to the fallacy of expecting bright children to read earlier. In her words, "Many of the smarter ones cannot catch on until later when the nervous system is ready."

Our concern, Spears says, must be with auditory and visual perception and this calls for much motor activity, much sensory experience. Many young children now are relatively inactive and involved in second-hand experience. They ride, not walk, to school, and sit for long periods before television. Kindergartens should not be similarly narrow and sedentary.

Such kindergartens, limited largely to crayon, paper, and workbooks, are in Dr. Spear's words, "delaying normal maturation and compounding learning problems."

Julius B. Richmond, M.D., Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics, College of Medicine at Syracuse, New York, speaks unequivocally of the dangers of ignoring the facts of development and demanding more of young children than they can comfortably produce. He, too, warns us against setting expectations which create emotional problems and learning difficulties. He, too, speaks of the many subtle psychosomatic problems of young children which are in response to the intensity of pressures placed upon them. He reminds us that one way a child has of defending himself against the tremendous pressure to learn is to refuse to learn, usually at an unconscious level. I presume we have many such children in the remedial reading clinics.

What price are we willing to pay for pressure? Are we unconsciously seeking personal gratification from the precocious achievement of our own children or the children we teach? What moral values do we violate when we experiment with children just to find what we can make them do? The question of an academic curriculum for young children is not an isolated one. What relationship do pressures upon young children to learn in unchildlike ways have to the high incidence among children and youth of psychosomatic illness, of mental breakdown, of outbreaks of senseless violence, of drug addiction, of suicide, of failure and dropouts? It seems reasonable to assume that the earlier undue pressure begins and the longer it lasts, the more serious its aftermath.

Such data as we have been discussing hold an important meaning over and beyond the hazards to physical and mental health that reside in subjecting

children to tasks they are not yet ready physically and psychologically to handle. Data from specialists such as Zike, Spears, and Richmond suggest that lack of sensory, perceptual and emotional stimulation delays physiological development of the nervous system and limits cerebral and cortical development. This is to say that a narrow, formal structured curriculum for young children not only does not raise the ceiling of intelligence but may actually limit intellectual development and later power to learn.

IN SUMMARY

What we know

Research dealing with early reading is limited and inconclusive. Such as is available leads us only to a conclusion which teachers of young children reached long ago - that a few precocious children, not as many as the current furore would lead us to believe, come to kindergarten knowing how to read, or trying to learn. Nothing in the research indicates that they should have formal, systematic instruction. On the contrary, their successful way of learning so far has been informal. Nothing in the kindergarten standards prevents informal help and encouragement to the children who are reading or seeking to learn. Nothing in the research suggests that any child is harmed if he is not taught reading at this time.

Data about the development of five year olds reinforced by dependable experience indicate that most kindergargarten children are not yet equipped to profit by systematic reading instruction. In most cases, temporary gains appear not to persist. Most children subjected to systematic teaching

are made to perform meaningless tasks, are placed under undue physical and psychological pressure, are exposed early to failure, and are kept from the active, creative, social, multisensory activities needed for good learning now and later. From all we know at present, early systematic reading instruction does not accelerate reading achievement. In fact, it may hinder reading progress and other forms of achievement.

The standards support what we know

It is upon data such as these that the kindergarten standards are based. It is reasonable to assume that the standards will change only when there is dependable evidence to indicate that changes are needed.

Ninety-four years are enough

You know, I sometimes listen to the clamor and wonder, "So what?" If you use structured readiness exercises maybe you can show two months gain on the readiness tests. If you put a three year old in a booth with a typewriter, maybe he'll burst into reading (although I don't know what he'll read!) If you print MAMMA on a large card in India ink and show it to the baby, and repeat MAMMA three times in clear objective tones, four times a day for a week, things may happen which will make you the envy of the neighborhood. After all the hypothesizing and testing of hypotheses and reaching of conclusions and summarizing and telling one another that "research says ...." one is tempted to ask, "So what?"

These young ones in the kindergarten are very new. You wonder if some of the promoters of early academic learning have ever taken a good look at

them with their aura of newness about them. They've been here only 60 months or so. The world that surrounds them is big and complicated - wonderful and frightening at the same time. They need a hand to hold. They need to run and shout. They need to stretch out and rest. They need the world brought into the classroom; they need to go out with the teacher into the world and learn about it, through their eyes and ears and their noses and fingertips. They can see a caterpillar eat its way into a pale green chrysalis and come forth a glorious monarch butterfly. They can observe lambs and calves and colts and rabbits and ducklings. They can plant things and watch them grow. They can watch hugh machines at work, houses being built, see big liners in the harbor, they can gather shells on the beach - there are a thousand thrilling things to do. They need to make sense and order of the great welter of experience which bombards them on every side - to make sense and order of it by talking about it and playing it out, and painting it and modeling it and building it, by hearing and making up stories and poems about it, by singing about it and saying what it means through rhythmic movement of their bodies.

They have so little time for these wonderful childlike ways of learning. Two and one-half hours isn't much time, especially when the curriculum must inevitably include putting on and taking off snowpants and boots, finding lost mittens, doctoring scratched knees, going to the toilet and getting drinks of water. How are we going to use this brief and precious time - to close the doors on the children's lives, or to open the doors?

Scientists are saying that many of the young ones now coming to school will live for a hundred years or more. Can't we spare them just a little time? Their lives will soon be filled with papers and pencils and bocks, with glib generalizations about the reality they often haven't experienced.

If we don't begin to teach reading until the first grade, they will still have 94 years left to read. Isn't that long enough?